5: Ó Danachair I-5 (no date) 1956 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

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Irish Farmyard Types

CAOIMHIN Ó DANACHAIR

DUBLIN

The fundamental need of shelter from the elements and protection during the hours of darkness is doubled for the farmer, who must provide shelter and protection for his livestock, his gear and his harvested crops as well as for himself and his family; the type of shelter which he provides is influenced not only by his traditional methods of using building materials but also by the type of husbandry in which he engages, the local conditions of soil and climate, and his own social and economic position in the community.

The climate of Ireland is mild and moist. The average January temperatures range from 40° to 44° F. over the whole country, while those of July range from 57° to 60°, and the average annual rainfall over five-sixths of the country is from 30 to 50 inches, with from 175 to 250 days on which some rain falls. Heavy snow, great cold or long continued frosts are very exceptional, as are long droughts or great heat. In such a mild climate hay and unthreshed corn may be stored outdoors in ricks or stacks, and this was the usual method of storage in Ireland until quite recently; it still is the usual method on many farms. Other crops, such as potatoes and roots, and even grain and apples were, in many parts of Ireland, stored outdoors in suitable pits or containers; this, too, is still often done in the case of potatoes. Consequently storage space for the harvested crops was not the most urgent of the farmer's building needs. Again, the mildness of the climate permits the keeping in the open throughout the year of certain kinds of livestock, such as sheep and dry cattle, while on the other hand milking cows must be kept indoors during the winter and early spring. Thus it may be said that, in general, the size and form of an Irish farmyard depends upon the number of milking cows kept by the farmer.

Although, in Ireland, the raising of crops, especially of grain crops, was neither small in volume or unimportant in rural economy, it was in most times and places secondary to cattlebreeding, stock-raising and dairying. The evidence of archaeology and history reveals the importance of cattle from a very early date down to our own time; even yet, in many parts of the country a man's wealth is reckoned not by the size of his farm but by the number of his cattle, and the area of a farm is commonly reckoned by the number of cattle which it will support—"the grass of ten cows" is still a familiar term.

Farms are generally classified as small, medium or large, according to their area. A farm of less

than 30 statute acres is regarded as small, one of from 30 to 100 acres as of medium size and one of over 100 acres as large. Small, medium and large farms may be found in all parts of Ireland, but in the provinces of Leinster and Munster and in parts of south east Connaught there is a preponderance of medium sized farms with, especially in north Leinster, a considerable proportion of large farms.[1] All this area practises mixed farming, but the south western province, Munster, is completely dominated by the milking cow, while in Leinster the northern half is mainly devoted to the raising of beef cattle, and the southern half produces considerable quantities of wheat, oats and barley.[2] In most areas of Connaught and Ulster, the western and northern provinces, the average farm is of small size, and the number of cows kept by each farmer correspondingly small; the value and productivity of these small farms, however, vary greatly from the intensive cultivation of many farms in east and south Ulster to the fisher-farmer economy of the west coastal districts.[3]

Throughout the provinces of Leinster and Munster, and in parts of east Connaught, that is to say, generally in the area of medium and large farms, the predominant, and in many districts exclusive, farmyard type is the courtyard, in which the dwelling house and outhouses are arranged about a rectangular space which is the farmyard proper. Most usually the buildings form three sides of the yard, with the dwelling house forming one side and the outhouses forming two more, the fourth side being closed by a wall with a gate. Usually the building is not continuous, the elements being separate and connected by walls, or having gateways or passages between them. The size and arrangement of the yard and the various buildings vary from one farm to another, and also from district to district; the general type is, however, well established, and conforms to a pattern which is clearly distinguished from the other types to be described later. In many districts the front of the dwelling house faces the farmyard, thus, in Co. Kildare in 1807: "The farmhouses in general consist of a long thatched building of one storey, consisting of a large kitchen and fireplace in the centre, and lodging rooms at either end; the front door looks to the barns and stables on the right, behind which is the haggard, and on the left are placed the cow and bullock houses." This, written a century and a half ago,[4] exactly describes many of the farmyards of to-day, for example that shown in fig. 1, which has the dwelling house in the middle, the cowhouse, calf-house and a small store (formerly a dairy) on the left, with the manure heap behind them, while on the right are the stable, another store and the pigstye, with the haggard, where the hay and corn stacks are made, behind them. The fourth side is formed by a stone wall, with a gate; this wall fronts on the public roadway. This farmyard is at Duncormick, Co. Wexford, in the south east corner of Ireland, but similar examples may be found in almost every part of the east and south. Figure 2 shows the buildings on a larger farm, also in Co. Wexford. Here the entrance gate leads in between a cart shed on the right and the dairy on the left, with the pump close by. Facing the dwelling house across the yard are the stable and byre and a store, while the corn barn opens into the haggard. The pigsty and manure heap are in the part of the yard most distant from the dwelling house. The openings between the various buildings are closed by stone walls about

[Text continues on p. 12]

[1] Agricultural Statistics, 1847–1926. Stationery Office, Dublin, 1930.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Freeman, T. W.: Ireland, Its Physical, Historical, Social and Economic Geography, 1950, chapters VIII and XVIII to XXIII.

[4] Rawson, T. J.: Statistical Survey of the County of Kildare, 1807, 14–15.

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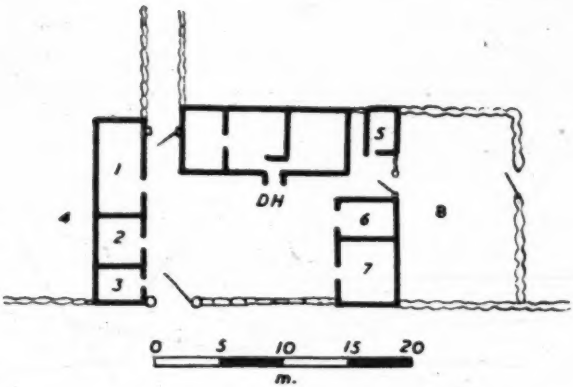

Fig. 1. Farmyard at Duncormick, Co. Wexford. DH, dwelling house; 1, byre; 2, calf house; 3, store; 4, manure heap; 5, pigsty; 6, cart house; 7, stable; 8, haggard.

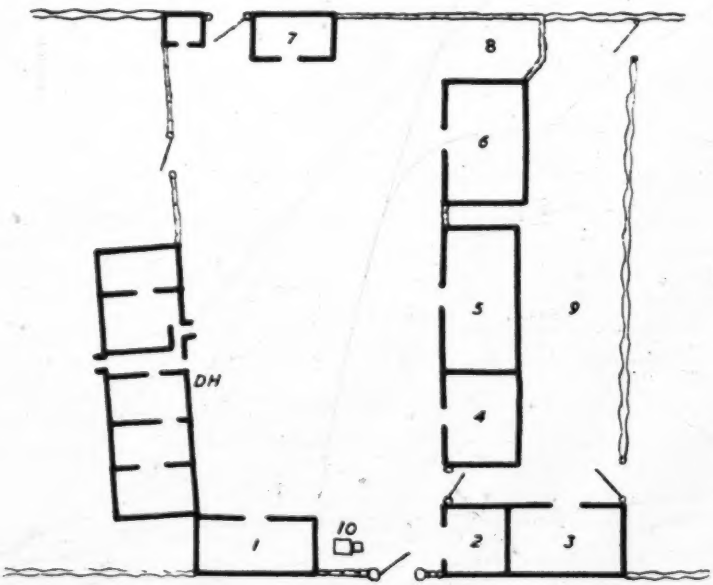

Fig. 2. Farmyard at Kilmore, Co. Wexford. DH, dwelling house; 1, dairy; 2, cart house; 3, corn barn; 4, stable; 5, byre; 6, store; 7, pigsty; 8, manure heap; 9, haggard; 10, pump.

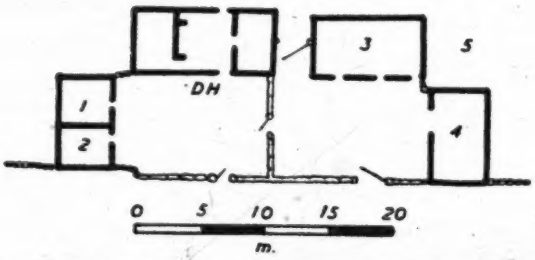

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Fig. 3. Farmyard, Killinny, Co. Galway. DH, dwelling house; 1, dairy; 2, store; 3, byre, 4, stable and carts; 5, manure heap.

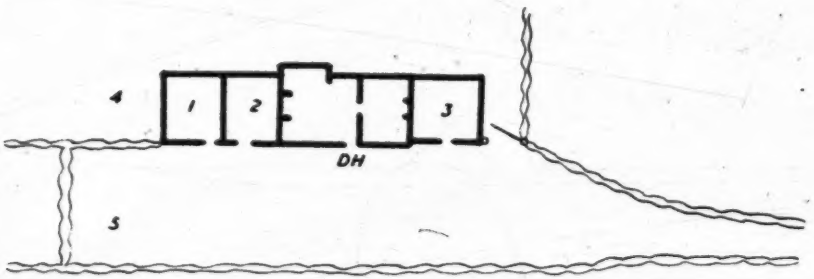

Fig. 4. Farmyard at Glenhull, Co. Tyrone. DH, dwelling house; 1, byre; 2, stable; 3, store; 4, haggard; 5, manure heap.

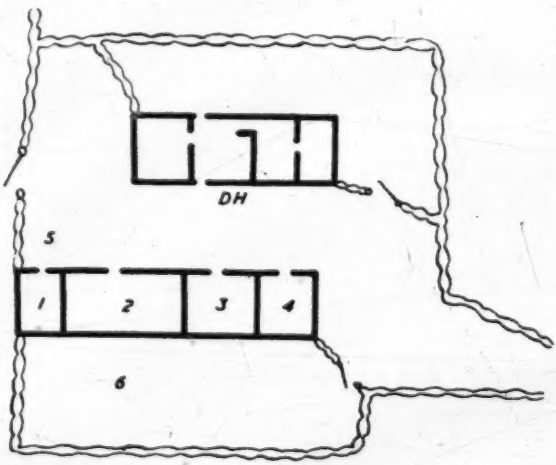

Fig. 5. Farmyard, Athea, Co. Limerick. DH, dwelling house; 1, pigs; 2, byre; 3, stable; 4, store; 5, manure heap; 6, haggard.

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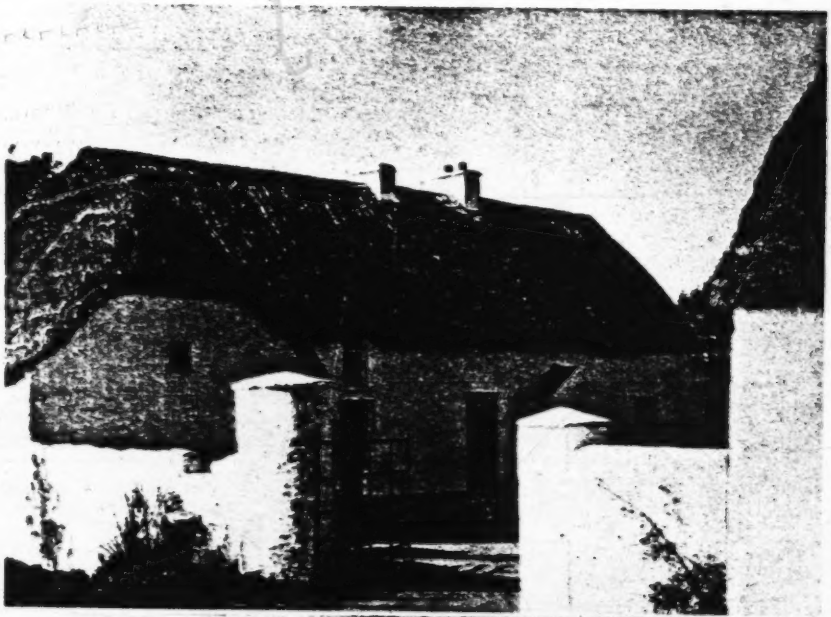

Fig. 6. Farmhouse and yard, Kilmore, Co. Wexford (fig. 2).

Fig. 7. Farmyard, Killimy, Co. Galway (fig. 3).

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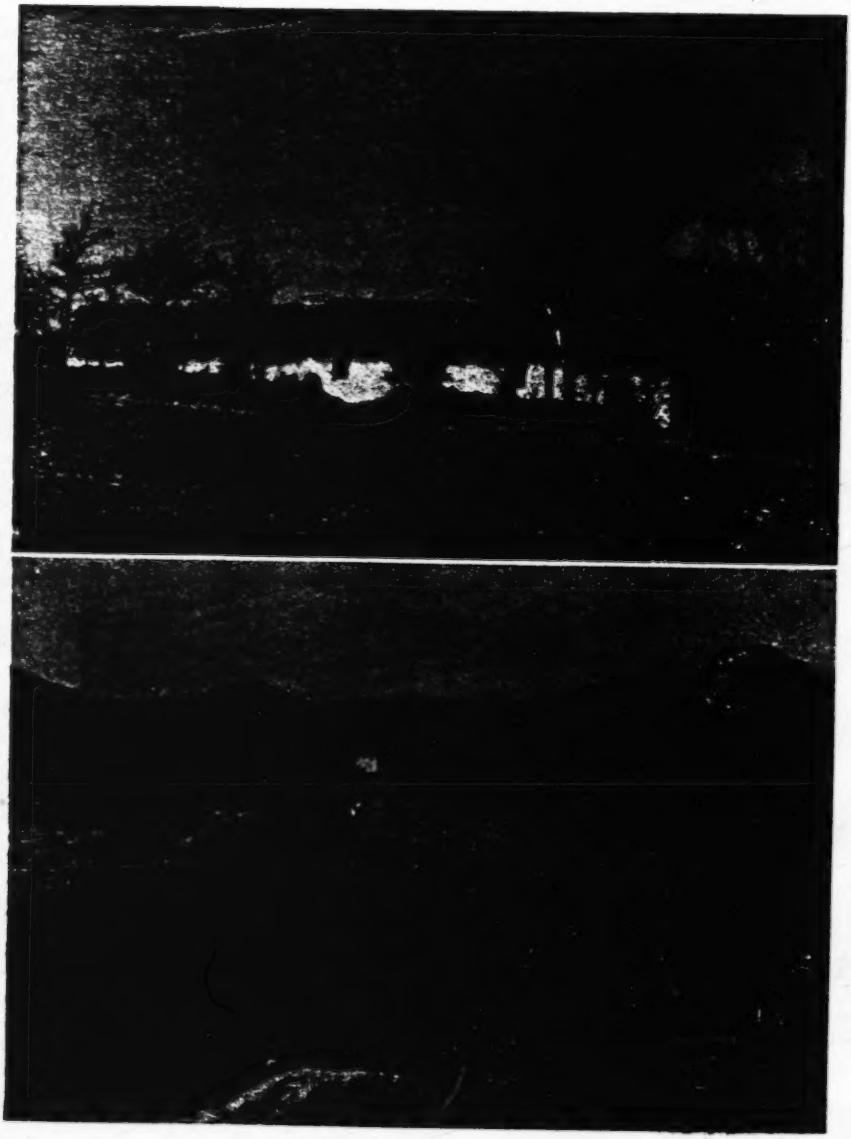

Fig. 8. Farm buildings, Glenhull, Co. Tyrone (fig. 4).
Fig. 9. Farm buildings, parallel lay-out, Lohar, Co. Kerry.

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four feet high, with gates suitably placed. A door in the back of the dwelling house leads into a garden and orchard. In both these examples the front of the dwelling house is towards the yard, but in very many examples the back of the dwelling house is towards the yard, which is reached by a back door, while the front of the house faces a small garden with flowers and fruit trees through which a path leads to the front door. This is especially common in east Munster. Figure 3 shows the buildings on a smaller farm in the south-eastern part of Co. Galway. Here again we have a courtyard formed by buildings on three sides and a stone wall with a gate on the fourth, but the courtyard is divided into two parts by another wall which protects the portion in front of the dwelling house, which is a little garden with flowers and shrubs, from the animals which pass through the yard.

In the smaller farms of the north and west there usually are fewer buildings, and these are often joined together in one continuous row, as in the example shown in figure 4, on a small farm in Co. Tyrone, where dwelling house, stable, byre and a store form one long block of buildings. Here, the elements are clearly distinguished from each other—the byre and stable are more roughly built, with poorer roof timbers and thinner walls, than the dwelling house, while the store at the other end is narrower than the dwelling house and has a lower roof. Indeed most examples of this well-known and widespread type have the dwelling house clearly distinguishable from the outhouses; thus they must not be confused with the "long-house" of Wales, of which the distinctive feature is internal communication between the byre and the dwelling.[1] In contrast to this, there is no such internal communication in this Irish type, as each house, stable, byre, store and so on has its own entrance door, and very often the dwelling house and byre do not adjoin, but have a stable, store or dairy between them. But, as we shall see below, there is—or was until recently—a primitive form of the "long house" or combined dwelling house and cattle byre to be found in certain parts of Ireland.

Another farmyard form to be found in parts of the north and west, and especially in the hill districts and peninsulas of west Munster, is shown in fig. 5. Here the outhouses are built in one continuous row, and placed a short distance away from, and parallel to, the dwelling house; the space between the dwelling house and the outhouses serving not only as a yard but also as a passage between the public road and the farmer's fields; this yard or passage is, in many districts, called the "street".

In addition to these various farmyard types, there may be found farms in which the buildings are not arranged in any set plan, but are scattered about in a haphazard fashion, sometimes without any yard; these occur but rarely in fertile lowlands but are not infrequent in mountain and moorland localities, such as parts of the Kerry mountains.

It cannot be doubted that the system of having separate compartments or buildings for the different kinds of animals and stores is of considerable antiquity in Ireland. The law tract *Críth Gablach*, written about A.D. 700, states that the *bó-aire febhsa* (a certain grade of land owner) must have, in addition to his dwelling house and a share in a corn-mill, a kiln, a barn, a sheep-fold, a pigsty and a calf-pen.[2] Another ancient law tract[3] refers to five "houses", namely, dwelling house, cow-

[1] Peate, I. C.: The Welsh House, 1940, chapter IV.
[2] Ancient Laws of Ireland, vol. IV, Dublin, 1879, 309.
[3] Ancient Laws of Ireland, vol. V, Dublin, 1901, 515.

house, pigsty, calf-pen and sheepfold, and there are several other references in the ancient law tracts to cow-houses and pigstyes.

But, notwithstanding this old and varied farmyard tradition, it is also quite clear that there was, up to the beginning of the present century, a widespread custom of keeping the livestock, or part of it, in the dwelling house. There are very many references to this in descriptions of life and conditions in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Few, however, give any description of the internal arrangement of the houses, or the reason for the custom, and usually the accounts refer to small houses and a few poor animals. Some observers have mentioned the fear of wild beasts or robbers. "They are brought in by night for fear of thieves, the Irish using almost no other kind of theft, or else for fear of wolves."[1] Here the writer refers to the bawns attached to the castles, but of course the same risk existed for the small farmer also. Another traveller writes of a night spent in a house in west Co. Galway: "I had just compos'd myselfe to sleepe when I was strangely surprised to heare the cows and sheep all comeing into my bed chamber. I enquired the meaneing and was told it was to preserve them from the wolfe which everie night was rambling about for prey."[2] Another and much later writer describes a night spent in a small house in the Kerry mountains, near Kenmare: "In the house where I slept—as indeed in every house of the same character in the county—the whole stock of the family, consisting chiefly of cows and sheep, were locked in at night. Such was the extreme poverty of the people that they would not otherwise be safe. ... There was a slight partition between the room where my bed was and the kitchen where there were three cows, a man, his wife and four children."[3]

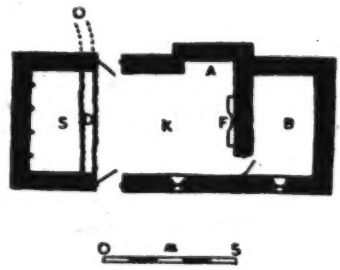

Fig. 10 House at Doolough, Co. Mayo. A, bed alcove; B, bedroom; D, drain; O, drain outlet; K, kitchen; F, fireplace; S, byre.

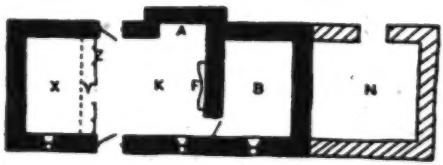

Fig. 11. House at Srahataggle, Co. Mayo. A, bed alcove; B, bedroom; K, kitchen; F, fireplace; X, former byre; Y, filled-in drain; Z, screen of canvas on wooden frame; N, present byre.

In many dwelling houses fowl, especially hatching hens, were kept in special coops or boxes, and it was quite usual to have weak or sickly young animals, or calves or lambs which for some reason were separated from their dams, in the kitchen where they had warmth and attention until strong enough to be put with the other animals. In many parts of Ireland the poorest people—

[1] Fynes Moryson: Itinerary, 1617.
[2] Dunton, John: Letter no. 2 (1699), in MacLysaght, E.: Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century, 1939. 339.
[3] Doumey, M.: The Felon's Track.

231 351 361 those who had little or no land—commonly kept their animals in the dwelling house (which often had only one room) at night, a cow or two, or perhaps a donkey or pony, a pig or a goat and a few hens, the larger animals tied to pegs or rings set in the walls, the smaller in coops or boxes. In many houses, even large farmhouses, a special coop or perch was provided for the cock, whose crowing served to call the people of the house in the morning. A vivid description of the housing conditions of a remote and isolated community in the second half of the nineteenth century is given by Tomás Ó Crohan, writing about the Blasket Islands off the coast of Co. Kerry in the extreme south west: "There was a coop beside the partition with hens in it, and a hatching hen in an old pot nearby. At night a cow or two, a calf or two, an ass, two dogs tied to the wall or loose about the house. ... the two or three dogs would lie at the foot of the bed, the cow or two cows below them, tethered to the wall, the calf or two with the run of the kitchen and their muzzles in the fire. The ass was tied on the side of the house opposite the cows, and a cat with a couple of kittens in the fireplace niche ... And as well as all the other animals you might find a pet lamb or two about the house."[1] The custom of bringing the cattle into the dwelling house for milking during the period of the year when they are kept outdoors, as well as keeping them in the dwelling house during the winter period is recorded from Co. Kerry.[2] Indeed it is quite clear that, throughout the west and north of Ireland, the keeping of livestock in their small dwelling houses by the poorer people was quite a common practice up to the last years of the nineteenth century, and in houses from which the animals have long been ejected we may still see the rings or pegs to which they used to be tied.

342 351 361 231 There was, however, one type of house which was built and arranged as a dwelling for both people and animals, and which was still in use in the early years of the present century in parts of Connaught and Ulster, that is, in west Co. Galway, Co. Mayo, west Co. Sligo and west and north Co. Donegal. Figure 10 shows the plan of a typical specimen, at Doolough, Co. Mayo. This house is 12 m long and 5.5 m wide, built of stone and mortar and roofed with straw or grass thatch. It consists of two apartments, the smaller being a bedroom and the larger a kitchen-livingroom-cattle byre; the two apartments separated by the wall of the hearth. On one side of the hearth is a bed alcove. Two windows, one in each room and both on one side—the front—of the house, give light, and there are two doors, one in the front of the house and one in the back, placed directly opposite each other. On the farther side of these doors from the fire an open drain extends from side to side of the house; this drain is about 50 cm wide and 25 cm deep and is lined with flat stones. The space between this drain and the end wall of the house is the byre, and here, during the winter, three or four cows were kept tethered to the wall. The drain passed under the wall and led to the manure heap outside.

Figure 11 shows the manner in which many of these houses were changed during the last fifty years or so. A byre was built, attached to the house, as here, or quite apart from it. The drain was filled in, and a partition of wood, or, as here of canvas stretched on a wooden frame, erected to enclose the former byre which now became a bedroom. In many houses the partition was formed

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[1] Ó Crohan, Tomás: An tOileánach, chapter III.

[2] Campbell, Åke: "Irish Fields and Houses", Béaloideas, V, 68–70.

or partly formed by one or more large pieces of furniture, such as a dresser and a cupboard or press.

While recorded instances of this type are, as we have seen, confined to comparatively small areas of the west and north west, there is little doubt that identical or similar forms were once more widespread in Ulster, Connaught and parts of west Munster, where a strong folk-memory of the regular stalling of cattle in the lower end (the end farthest from the fire) of the kitchen still exists, and where one common house type has the two opposite doors and the lower end cut off by a partition of light material, as in the reconstructed house shown in figure 11. In Leinster and east Munster, in contrast to this, there is little or no tradition of cattle in the dwelling houses, and there is here a form of house in which the relative positions of the entrance door, hearth and hearth wall[1] would make the bringing of a large animal, such as a cow, into the house very difficult and in many cases quite impossible.

A recent article has shown that while the dispersed settlement pattern now dominates almost the whole of Ireland, there were formerly, and to a little extent still are, certain definite areas of village or group settlement type.[2] This, however, does not mean that a distinctive type of farmyard pattern is to be found in such groups or villages; on the contrary, the farmyard type in them is the same as that in the adjoining areas of dispersed settlement. Thus, the groups or villages of east Co. Galway and south Co. Kilkenny are formed of farmyards of the courtyard type, those of west Co. Kerry of the parallel type and those of west Co. Mayo and north and west Co. Donegal of the dwelling house-cum-byre type.

The middle of the twentieth century sees the Irish farmyard, in common with many other elements of rural life, in a stage of transition. On many farms new outhouses, especially new cattle-byres, are being built; in others new dwelling houses have been built, and the old dwelling houses refitted as byres, stores or stables, thus quite changing the aspect of the farmyard. The dwelling-cum-byre type of the north west has virtually disappeared, and in a few years will be no more than a memory; the extended type, in which dwelling house and outhouses form a long block of buildings is also disappearing.

[1] Ó Danachair, Caoimhín: "Hearth and Chimney in the Irish House", Béaloideas, xvi, 102, 104.

[2] Flatrès, P.: "L'Habitat Agricole Aggloméré en Irlande", Chronique Géographique des Pays Celtes, 1954, 113–24.